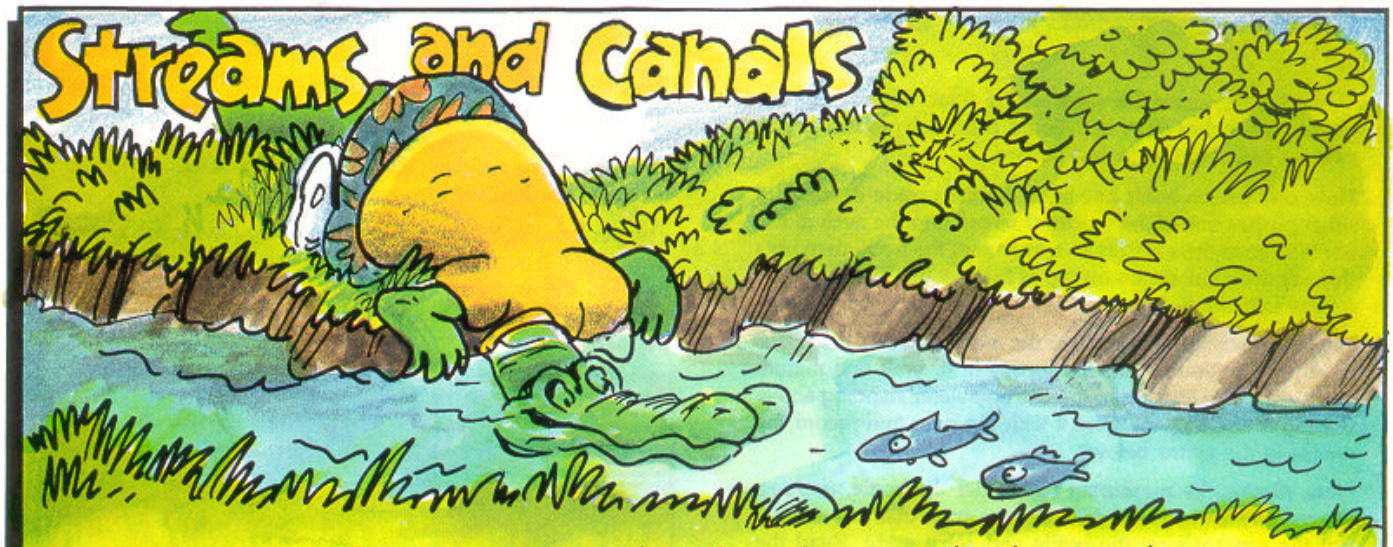
Water and the Land

Even though we get most of our drinking water from underground, it started out as rain on the surface. If South Florida were one big parking lot, the water wouldn't soak into the ground and the groundwater wouldn't be there for us when we needed it.

What's the point? Well, think about it. All the bodies of water we see on the surface are important to our water supply. From them comes a lot of the water that recharges our aquifers. And, my friends, those bodies of water are also important to the fish, birds and other wildlife — like yours truly! So let's check out the surface waters of South Florida.

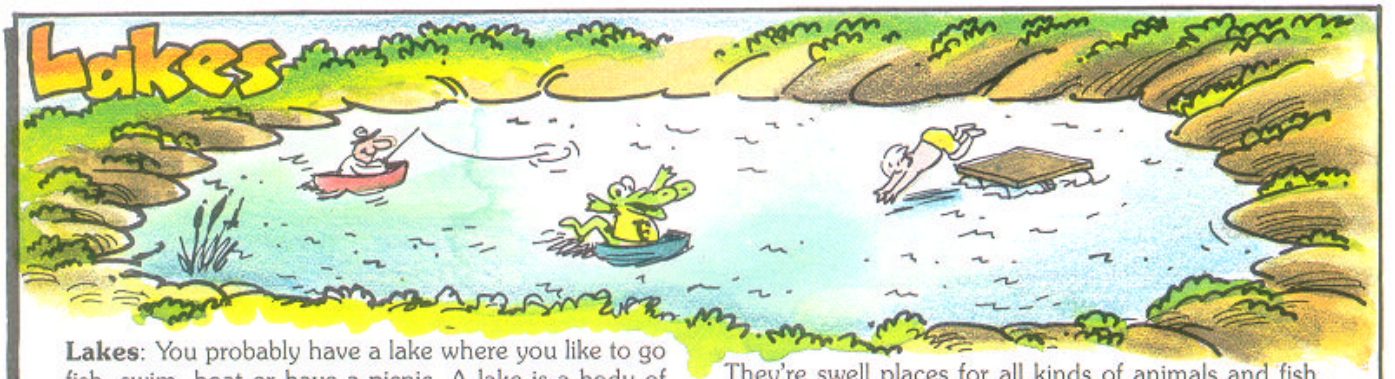
We've already learned about drainage basins. But where does all that water drain? Well, if it doesn't soak into the ground then it runs into some kind of body of water.

Streams and Canals

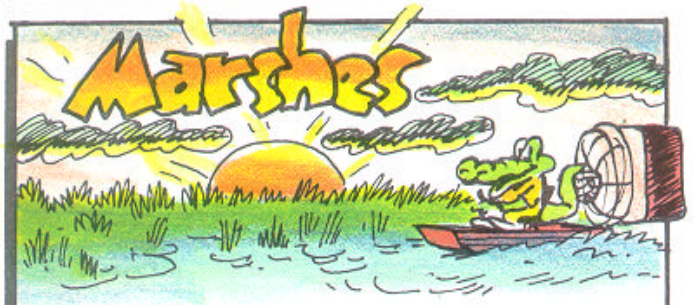


Streams and **Canals**: Creeks and rivers are examples of streams. They move water from one place to another. Streams are also home to little water creatures and fish that are food for birds and other animals.

People-made channels that move water from one place to another, or hold water, are called canals. The difference between canals and streams is that streams are created naturally. Canals have to be dug. People in the water business build canals to get water to places where it is needed. They also dig them to move water out of areas where floods occur.

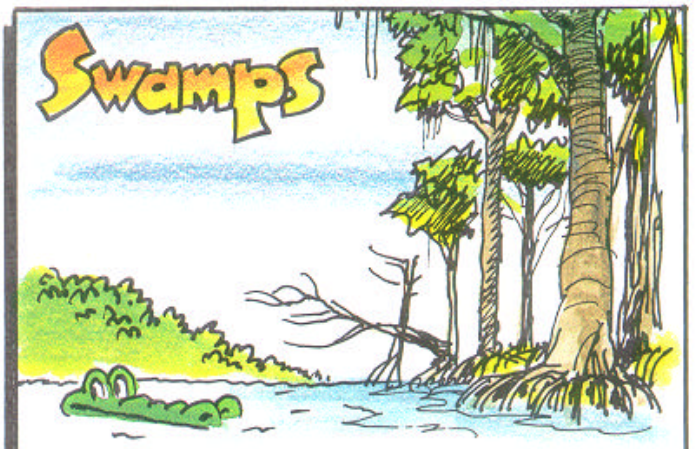


Lakes: You probably have a lake where you like to go fish, swim, boat or have a picnic. A lake is a body of water surrounded by land. Lakes can be natural or man-made. In South Florida we have lots of man-made lakes. They're swell places for all kinds of animals and fish. Lakes also store water that helps keep streams flowing during dry months. Small lakes are called ponds.

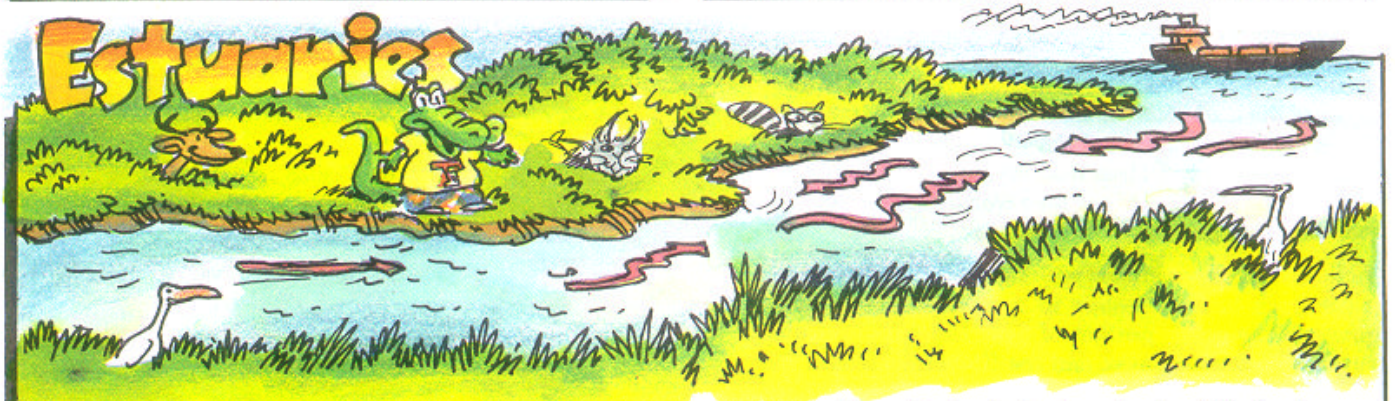


Wetlands: Areas that are under water for a lot of the year are called wetlands. The main thing that controls life in wetlands is water. There are two main types of wetlands — marshes and swamps. Here's the difference.

Marshes: A marsh is a fairly flat wetland. There are freshwater and saltwater marshes. Marshes have many grasses but only a few trees. Marshes are important because all those roots stop soil from washing away. The grassy plants also filter out pollution, so marshes help keep our streams and lakes clean, too. Healthy marshes are so full of life they are like bird heavens — because of all the food they find there.



Swamps: A swamp is another type of wetland — not as flat as a marsh. The big difference between a swamp and a marsh is the type of plant life there. In a swamp you'll find lots of trees, like cypress, mangroves, palms and pines. Swamps are great places to find all kinds of interesting animals, like bears, deer, racoons and, of course, alligators.



Estuaries: An estuary is an inland area where the freshwater from the land meets the saltwater from the sea. Water in estuaries has some salt, but not as much as sea water. Many kinds of plant and animal life live in estuaries, including bobcats, racoons and deer.